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The Mysterious Light-Ship:

OR,

THE SMUGGLERS
Of the Death-Coast.

By ROGER STARBUCK.



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THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT-SHIP:

OR,

THE SMUGGLERS OF THE DEATH-COAST.

By ROGER STARBUCK,

Author of "The Boy Wrecker; or, The Young Pilot of the Breakers," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A PERILOUS CONTRIVANCE.

"LIGHT O, right ahead!" roared the lookout at the bow.

The speaker was one of the watch aboard the United States gun-brig, *Dolphin*, from San Francisco.

She was a neat little craft, carrying six guns, and commanded by Captain Rawlins, who was in search of a notorious smuggler—a piratical sort of desperado called Ned Watkins, known to have secret hiding-places both on the west coast of Mexico and Panama.

Where these hiding-places were located none of the revenue officers had yet been able to discover, but some of their vessels had actually been fired upon and damaged by the bold smuggler.

The latter was reported to be the captain of an armed topsail schooner, which was so swift a sailer that she had thus far baffled all the efforts of those who had attempted her capture.

At present the *Dolphin* was about fifty miles to the westward of the coast of Panama, in 6 degrees, north latitude.

The night was both dark and misty, and the brig was heading along to the southward before a light breeze, which was dying away when the man on the lookout gave notice of there being a light ahead.

The captain, a middle-aged, weather-beaten sailor, who was on deck, soon had his night glass to his eye, but the mist was too thick for him to make out much more than a vessel's topmast, with a large globe-like lantern attached to the head of it.

"It seems to be a light-ship, Mr. Gray," he remarked, in surprise, to his lieutenant. "What can such a craft be doing here?"

"Ay, ay, sir, I should say she was a light-ship," replied the lieutenant. "She must somehow have drifted from her moorings. That is the only way I can account for her being where she is."

As he spoke the light suddenly disappeared.

Then all at once, a rocket was seen to shoot up high in air from the mysterious vessel and break into red, blue and green stars, which fell in showers toward the sea.

"That was of course meant for a signal," remarked the captain.

Just then the top sails commenced to rattle fore and aft, and a moment later the breeze had entirely left the brig.

"Send Mr. Ray here," said the captain to the lieutenant.

Mr. Robert Ray—a young master's mate of twenty, soon came up and touching his cap, awaited orders.

"Mr. Ray," said the captain, "you will take the second cutter, with an armed crew, and try to board the light-ship we have just seen. As she cannot be more than eighty fathoms distant, a rope can be attached to the stern of the cutter—with one end fast to this craft. That will prevent your losing us in the fog and darkness, when you are ready to return."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Ray.

"Choose for yourself the midshipman you would have with you."

"I would prefer Mr. Dale, Captain Rawlins."

"Very well, sir. Find out all about this strange vessel. I have a suspicion she is in some way connected with the smuggler we are after. Be as quick as you can, for I think we'll have a blow of some kind soon."

"Shall I capture her, if she shows fight?"

"If you can. Be not too rash, however. If she seems to have more men than you have, and resists, the coxswain can blow the fog-horn and we will send you assistance."

"Ay, ay, sir. Any further orders, captain?"

"No, sir. You can go now."

Mr. Ray saluted, and soon the cutter was down and manned with its crew of twelve, armed with cutlasses. Mr. Ray and Mr. Dale were also armed—the former with a sword and pistol and the latter with his dagger and a small revolver.

Richard Dale, the midshipman, was a fine-looking youth of seventeen, with brown hair and dark, spirited eyes.

He was an orphan, the son of an army officer, who had died in San Francisco, a year after Richard had received his warrant in the navy.

The boy was of a frank, generous nature, and as he had shown unusual courage during the Mexican war, he was liked and respected by the officers as well as by the crew of the brig.

Not wishing that the light-ship's occupants should be aware of the lowering of the cutter, it had been dropped as silently as possible, without the usual sounding of the boatswain's whistle.

"Shove off! give way!" ordered Mr. Ray, in a low voice, and the boat left the side of the vessel—a quartermaster aboard "paying out" the coil of rope fast to it, as it receded in the fog and darkness.

The boat was headed in the direction where the light had been seen.

To the surprise of the cutter's occupants, they could now detect no sign of the vessel.

Hither and thither did they pull, vainly looking for it in the fog and gloom.

"She has changed her position, that's plain," said Mr. Ray. "Probably she has had her boats down towing her. As we are now at the end of the rope leading from the brig we can go no further, and will have to return aboard the *Dolphin*."

"What is that?" inquired Dale, pointing ahead.

There the indistinct outline of something was discernable.

"I can't make it out," said Mr. Ray. "I should say it was a boat."

"Ay, sir, it looks like one as well as we can see in the darkness."

It is drifting this way, I think, but so slowly that it will be an hour reaching us."

"There—see there—a light in it," suddenly cried Mr. Ray.

In fact something like a spark of fire now was seen on the floating object.

"If you consent, I will swim to it," said Dale.

"You are a good swimmer?"

"Yes, sir."

"We will both go!" cried Mr. Ray, after a moment's reflection.

Doffing their hats, shoes and outer upper garments, which they tied to their shoulders, and leaving the coxswain to take charge of the cutter until their return, the two young officers swam for the supposed boat.

As they drew nearer to it, they perceived that it really was not a boat, but a small raft.

The spark on it had become larger and now seemed to emit a hissing sound.

"What can that mean?" said Mr. Ray.

"It puzzles me," answered his companion.

Side by side they swam on, and were soon close enough to the raft to perceive that there was a train of hissing fire upon it.

They kept on, but when close alongside of the raft there was an upward burst of flame, and the master's mate sang out:

"Dive—dive for your life, Dale!"

The youth obeyed, and both dove beneath the service.

It was well they did so.

As they were about going down there was a noise like the bursting of a thunderbolt.

The whizzing fragments of a large shell narrowly missed their heads ere they disappeared beneath the water.

When they rose to the surface they were surprised to find the previously calm surface foaming and hissing in a squall which had suddenly swooped down upon the sea.

The raft on which the shell had exploded was near them, still, fortunately, uninjured.

They swung themselves upon it, and now the full violence of the squall broke forth.

CHAPTER II.

ADRIFT.

THE direction of the gale was away from the cutter.

Therefore the two officers were driven farther from it every moment.

They clung to the ropes with which the timbers were lashed together, while the seas occasionally washed over them.

In the gloom and the driving rack they could see nothing of the boat they were receding from.

"This will not last long," remarked Mr. Ray, shouting to make himself heard above the roar of the storm.

"I hope we'll succeed in getting back to the cutter," said Dale.

"I think we will. I've no doubt now that this raft was sent adrift by some friend of the smuggler, but he was nicely baffled, as the shell exploded before it drifted to the cutter."

"Ay, not knowing the cutter was fast to the brig by a rope, he probably thought it would be pulled up to the raft just in time for the shell with the train attached to it to explode."

As the agitation of the water increased and the great surges whirled the raft about and sometimes swept over it, its occupants found it difficult to keep their position.

They tightened their grasp and clung to it for their lives.

Onward were they swept directly before the raging blast.

The seas kept rising higher, and they finally became aware that the squall, instead of passing away, was merged into a heavy gale.

Several times they were almost jerked away from their hold.

"My wrists are nearly cramped. I cannot hold on much longer!" cried Ray.

"Can you not twist the rope about your wrists?"

"No, it is too short. If I am swept off and you ever get back to the brig tell Captain Rawlins that I did my duty."

"Certainly, but you shall not be washed away if I can help it."

At the risk of his own life Dale, watching his chance, cut away a trailing length of rope attached to one of the timbers.

Then, watching his chance, he tied it secure about the breast of his companion and fastened the end to one of the spars.

"Well done, Dale. I believe you have saved my life," said Ray, gratefully.

But even as he spoke a sea swept over the raft, and Dale was hurled along with it.

In another moment he must have been carried off far to leeward but for his arms slipping down through one of the openings between the timbers.

Around this timber he threw both arms, and thus saved himself from going further.

Meanwhile the raft was borne on before the gale.

The dash of the seas against it and its violent motion had loosened some of the timbers.

"Do you think it will hold?" inquired Richard.

"I cannot tell. If these seas continue I'm afraid it will go to pieces before long."

"How far do you think we are from the coast?"

"All of forty miles, I should say."

"I think I see a light ahead of us," cried Dale, suddenly.

"Ay, there's a light, sure enough. By the look of it, I think it is that of a light-ship."

Both the occupants of the raft kept their gaze upon the light.

Gradually they could make out the globular light of the vessel they had spoken of.

"We are being carried straight toward her!" said Mr. Ray.

"Yes, sir, but I hope we may drift past her."

A few minutes later they could see the outline of the craft.

When still nearer, they could detect the yellowish color of her hull through the gloom.

A dim form in an oil-skin coat and sou'wester was bending over the after rail.

The vessel, close hauled, was lying to, pitching and rolling in the seas.

She had three very short masts, and her main topsail was close-reefed.

Suddenly the man in the oil-skin coat bawled out:

"Blue lights, there, boys, lively. Here's something close aboard!"

"Down! Crouch low! We may escape being seen!" said Ray.

"The man holds a rifle, and will fire at us if he sees us!"

Dale lay down between two of the logs, and his companion did the same.

The raft was swept on and just as it was opposite the vessel's lee counter the blue-lights began to burn, shedding a bright gleam upon the waters and distinctly revealing the raft.

The man with the rifle detected the crouching forms of the two officers, as the raft was borne past the vessel, and, raising his rifle, he fired.

The bullet chipped a piece from the log behind which Dale was lying, and just missed his head.

A moment later the raft was carried far past the vessel by the rolling seas.

Then a hoarse voice was heard issuing orders.

"A pull on the weather braces! Lively, men!"

"They are going to try to run us down," said Ray.

The outline of the vessel soon was seen as she came tearing along toward the raft.

Presently she was close to it, with her blue lights again burning.

Lifted by a huge sea, it looked as if she must, the next moment, be borne down upon the raft.

On she came, and now the exulting shouts of her crew were heard.

Her broad bows, pointed straight toward the drifting platform of logs, were swept toward the center of it.

One blow from these heavy bows would dash it to fragments.

Both Ray and Dale gave themselves up for lost.

But as the vessel was borne toward them with the rapidity of lightning, a cross-sea struck the raft, and the craft, just grazing it, shot past.

"We are saved!" cried Ray.

"Yes, sir, the vessel cannot beat up to us again in such a blow."

This was true.

The hull of the light-ship soon was lost to view in the gloom, and before long even her globular lantern was obscured by the mist and the darkness.

Hours passed, and still the two officers, carried along on the raft, heard the gale raging about them.

Drenched and almost suffocated by the seas, they suddenly beheld something dark looming up ahead, with masses of white water and spray flying around it.

"It is a rock," cried Dale.

"Then we are lost," answered Ray. "Nothing can save us now."

Even as he spoke an enormous sea caught the raft and hurled it swiftly toward the rock.

A moment later, with a loud crash, the raft struck the rugged projection, and was torn asunder.

The officers were unhurt, but they found themselves apart from each other, struggling in the wild, tumultuous waters.

Dale, throwing out his arms, as he was being carried past a projecting spur of rock, managed to clutch it. He held on, and, drawing himself up, soon reached a sheltered niche in the mass of rock.

Presently, as he peered forth, looking for his late companion, he fancied he heard a voice beneath him.

At the peril of his life, he clambered down the rock, and beheld Ray clinging to a rugged knob.

It was not long enough to enable him to obtain a good hold, and he was every instant in danger of being whirled away from it.

Dale saw a huge sea coming and realized that there was no time to lose, if he would save the master's mate.

He reached down, caught him by the collar, and with great exertion drew him up out of the water.

"Now hold hard for your life!" he cried, as the sea came thundering down toward the rock.

The two clung to a rugged column, and, though the sea, dashing upon them, lifted them from their feet, they kept their hold. A moment later both Ray and Dale had clambered up to the sheltered hollow.

CHAPTER III.

THE DRAGON'S MOUTH.

The gale now showed signs of abating, and before dawn it had subsided to a moderate breeze.

As the light began to creep through the drifting fog, the latter gradually lifted.

Then the officers, looking about them, discovered that they were not half a mile from the coast of Panama.

On this part of it huge cliffs rose close to the shore, extending along as far as the eye could reach.

But no sign of a human being could be seen on this desolate shore.

Both officers looked seaward, hoping to discern some friendly sail, but the vast expanse of water was unbroken, save by the rolling surges.

"We will swim to the shore," said Ray. "Probably we will find some crabs or shell-fish there. At any rate, we will find a place in the hollow of some rock where we can obtain rest and sleep. I am worn out. How is it with you, Dale?"

"My whole body feels as if it had been battered," the youth answered. "I will also own that I have a tremendous appetite."

"We had better make a start then," said Ray.

They did not have to stop to divest themselves of any of their clothing. The master mate's coat and shoes, and Dale's jacket and slippers were lashed to the shoulders of each as they were when they left the cutter to swim for the raft.

They struck out for the beach, and were within twenty fathoms of it, when suddenly a huge sperm whale, with an enormous jaw, showing the white scroll of his teeth, rose in their front, making straight toward them.

The creature had been wounded by a harpoon, which could be seen protruding from its hump, and was booming along with tremendous speed.

Its eyes being on each side of its head, and the swimmers' position being directly in front of it, it was evident the whale did not see them.

Therefore it was that Dale, who was some yards ahead of his companion, was in danger of being scooped up by the monster's jaw, ere he could sheer aside or dive.

The youth had in fact given himself up for lost, when Ray uttered a loud shout, at the same time beating the water with his feet.

In an instant, just as the great jaw was about closing over the boy,

the monster turned off, heading on a diagonal course toward the sea.

"That was easily done!" cried Ray. "The whale is soon galled (frightened) by a noise."

"I would not have thought of that," said Dale. "But for you that whale would have had me in his jaws."

"It has been struck within a few days, as I should judge by the line and harpoon. Probably some whaler has lately been cruising near this coast."

The two, not long after, gained the beach.

They found a few crabs adhering to the rocks, which, evidently, at high tide, were washed by the water.

Dale had some matches in a rubber safe, and, by means of these, a fire soon was made with some driftwood, which was found piled in a hollow among the rocks.

The wood had evidently been brought to this place, as there were traces of a fire having been made at some late period, on a broad ledge projecting from the front of the cliff a few feet above the beach.

Having soon roasted the crabs, the officers made a tolerable meal.

Then, putting on their coats, caps, and shoes, they moved along the projections of the cliff, looking for some cave or recess in which they might obtain rest.

In a small hollow they found a can of preserved meat, and also a bag, which, on opening it, they discovered to be half filled with sea-biscuits.

Near these provisions were pieces of spun yarn, and also the broken shank of a harpoon.

"These 'tell the story,'" said Ray. "A boat's crew of whalers have lately been on this coast, and that explains the presence of the whale we saw so near the shore. The sperm whale generally keeps away from shallow places near the land, but the one we met had evidently been seen out at sea, and being struck and badly hurt, had, after taking all the fast boat's line, been so closely headed off as to be obliged to make toward the coast."

The can of meat was opened, and the two officers made an excellent meal.

"Now for sleep," said Ray, whose eyes were already closing from drowsiness.

They lay down in a sheltered nook among the rocks with their coats for pillows, and, notwithstanding their hard bed, they were soon fast asleep.

They judged they must have slept a long time when they finally awoke, as the sun, high in the heavens, was shining upon the sparkling water and the tide had risen almost to their feet.

"Come," said Ray, "the best that we can do at present is to watch for a sail. Who knows that we may not soon behold the *Dolphin*?"

The two were climbing the cliff to attain a higher position than they occupied, when suddenly Dale laid a hand on his companion's arm.

"See there—a vessel's mizzen mast, if I am not mistaken!"

And, as he spoke, he pointed along the cliff toward an inlet or small bay, which opened in the rugged wall of rocks about a hundred fathoms from the place where the seamen stood.

"Ay," said Ray, "I'll warrant you that is the whaler of which we have been speaking."

The two hurried along the ledge of the cliff they occupied, but they had not proceeded far when they suddenly paused and looked at each other in dismay.

A projection of the rocky wall affording them a better view of the craft, they perceived that she was none other than the light-ship!

Hastily they drew back against the rock, but even as they did so they perceived that the mizzen-mast of the vessel had suddenly vanished.

Bending forward from their position, and thus obtaining a view of the mouth of the bay, they discovered that the craft was gone!

"What can that mean?" said Ray.

"Ay—what? It puzzles me, I must own."

"The sails of the craft were furled. She must have been towed further into the bay."

They hurried on, and soon gained the part of the cliff which formed the edge of the bay.

Looking round it, they saw the full extent of the bay, which was about two hundred feet in length and seventy in width.

But they discovered no sign of a vessel of any kind.

The light-ship had strangely, mysteriously vanished.

"What can have become of her?" said Dale.

Ray's eyes lighted up.

"Dale," said he, "depend upon it that if we discover where this craft is, we will find out that it is the secret hiding-place of the smuggler, Ned Watkins!"

"You think, then, that the craft is hidden somewhere among the rocks?"

"Ay, probably there is a large cavern or archway at the extremity of the bay into which she has been towed by her boats."

"Shall we go and look for this cavern?"

"Yes, but we must be very careful, as we know nothing about the place and might be discovered."

The two soon found a rugged ledge that would lead them around the edge of the height, along the wall which formed one side of the bay.

This ledge, sloping downward, brought them to a small strip of beach on the edge of the bay.

Then they beheld an inlet leading into a sort of narrow ravine between two walls of the height.

This ravine was overhung by masses of vines and other shrubbery that projected from earthy crevices in the rocks on both sides and darkened the inlet, so that it could only be dimly seen.

"Stay here, Dale, and keep a lookout, while I venture into this place," said Ray. "There may be a skiff or canoe here, which would be useful to us. This would seem to show there is one."

As he spoke he pointed to a paddle which was floating on the water of the inlet.

Dale stood on the beach near the entrance of the inlet, while Ray, making stepping-places of projections on one of the walls, kept on into the inlet.

All at once the boy imagined he heard a splash.

He looked into the inlet, but could see nothing of his late companion.

Thinking he might be hidden by a projection of the wall he called him by name in a low voice.

There was no response.

Then Dale was about entering the narrow ravine, as the master's mate had done, to look for him, when he saw a small skiff gliding along the surface.

It contained a single occupant, and as the skiff emerged from the entrance into the light Dale perceived that this person was a stout, brown-faced female wearing the garb of a fisherwoman.

On seeing Dale her black eyes lighted with an expression of surprise.

"Hah, boy!" she cried, in a hoarse voice. "How strange to see one like you here."

"I am as much surprised to see one of your sex on this lonely, out-of-the-way place," was expressed in the midshipman's face, and the woman seemed to understand the look at once.

"My husband has a hut not far from here," she explained. "He fishes for pearls and I for the kind of fish that serves for our food."

"Probably you saw my companion—another officer—in that inlet from which you have just come?" said Dale.

"Not I. I saw not a soul there save myself."

"He just went in there along the wall. You must have seen him."

"How? D'y'e tell me I lie? If your companion went along that wall he may never come out again. He has probably fallen into the Dragon's Mouth."

"Where?"

"The Dragon's Mouth we call it. It is a sulphur pit. Overcome by the fumes, he has most likely tumbled into it, and I can tell ye, if so, that you'll never meet him on this side of Heaven."

CHAPTER IV.

THE RUIN.

On hearing this dreadful announcement, Dale stared at the woman as if he could not credit the assertion.

"Come into the skiff, my boy, and I'll show you the place," she said.

As the skiff touched the strip of beach, Dale entered it, when the woman paddled the boat into the mouth of the inlet.

The skiff had not proceeded three fathoms, when Dale became aware of a strong, sulphurous odor.

"There it is," the woman said, as they passed the bulging wall of rock the youth had previously noticed.

She pointed to a slanting hole in the rock, from which the fumes of sulphur issued with so strong an odor as to almost overpower her companion in the skiff.

"D'y'e believe me now? Eh? Eh?" said the owner of the skiff. Dale stared at the opening.

"I should think he might have drawn back in time to escape falling," he said.

"No, the odor was overpowering. It stupefied him, and he fell in."

"Did you see him fall, then?" the boy inquired.

"I? No, I must have been some yards away when it happened."

"A dreadful fate!" cried Dale. "Little did I fancy such was his destiny when he quitted me."

"Well, it's so and there's no use of moaning over it. Will you go with me to my husband's hut? I do not think you have much in the way of provision to boast of in that bag slung to your back. I can furnish you with something fit to eat for a consideration."

As she spoke, the black eyes of the speaker twinkled.

"There are sea-biscuits in the bag; but I am not hungry now."

"Tell me how you came to be on this part of the coast which my husband and I call the Death coast."

"I and my late companion were cast away. That is as much as I feel at liberty to tell you."

"Your uniform shows that you belong to the navy. I can imagine whom your captain has been looking for."

"For whom do you think?"

"For the smuggler, Nat Watkins."

"How came you to guess that?"

"It is well known that the Government vessels are searching for him."

"Perhaps you have seen him. Perhaps you can give me some information about him. Half pirate as he is, he should be captured."

"Call you that man a pirate who merely defends himself from arrest?"

"Yes, when he is engaged in unlawful calling."

"Well, every one to his fancy. For my part, I would not betray the smuggler, even were you to reward me handsomely for doing so."

Dale looked at the speaker.

"You know where his hiding-place is?"

"Ah, that I do, and as you are most too near it to suit my taste, I see no reason why I should not send you after your fellow officer!"

As she spoke, the woman, to Dale's surprise, pulled a pistol from the pocket of the coat she wore, and pointed it at the boy's head.

The youth looked at her fixedly.

"I see," he said. "The smuggler is a friend of yours. You have the advantage of me and can shoot me, if you like, but my death will not go unavenged. I would rather a man's hand should send me to my doom, for it is painful to think of the hangman's rope about the neck of a woman!"

The latter smiled.

The boy's coolness seemed to please her.

"Upon my word," she said, "I think well of your navy, which trains such youngsters as yourself. Give up your dagger to me, and I will not shoot you—at least not at present."

"You ask too much of me. I will have to refuse to give up my only weapon of defense."

"In that case, I will help myself to it!" cried the woman.

Before Dale had time to offer resistance, she pounced upon him, and hurling him down, essayed to tie his wrists with a rope she had picked up from the bottom of the skiff.

Dale strove to escape from her, but, to his surprise, her grasp was like iron.

Weakened as he was by his late hardships, the youth was soon overpowered, and found himself seated before his late opponent with his wrists tightly fastened by the rope, which was secured with a difficult knot.

Ashamed of having been thus captured by a woman, he colored deeply.

"You need not feel hurt about it," she said, while a half smile lurked about the corners of her mouth. "I have mastered strong men before now."

In fact, as he looked at the speaker's broad, square shoulders, long

arms and determined face, Dale could hardly doubt the truth of her assertion.

"Why have you bound me? Where would you take me?" he inquired.

"You shall know in time."

So saying, having possessed herself of his dagger and pistol, she seized her paddle, and urged the skiff swiftly along.

Soon she reached the rocky cliff at the further side of the bay.

"Wait a moment," she said. "Don't attempt to leave the skiff. With your arms bound as they are, it will be the worse for you if you do."

She stepped out of the boat, and secured it by a warp to a rocky spur, after which she moved along a narrow ledge leading toward a thick clump of shrubbery a few yards off.

In this clump she soon vanished.

Scarcely was she gone, when Dale strove to free himself from his cords.

He twisted and jerked his wrists vigorously.

But the rope was tied with a bowline knot, which only became tighter the harder he struggled.

Suddenly he noticed a hatchet lying in the skiff.

The edge of this instrument was partly turned upward.

Dale was enabled to draw his cords lightly across it.

The strands in this way were partly severed.

A vigorous jerk then parted the rope.

The boy's wrists were free.

He produced his pocket-knife, and with one blow severed the boat's warp.

Then he picked up the paddle and urged the light vessel along toward a small cove a few yards off.

He soon reached the cove.

In it there was a hollow or small cave.

This he entered.

There he remained for some time.

He could hear the voice of the woman as she shouted angrily, while looking for the skiff.

There was no way for her to reach the cove where Dale was except by swimming.

But it was evident she thought the boy had paddled out of the bay and around the edge of the cliff.

Dale saw her moving along the ledge in that direction.

As soon as she had vanished round the cliff, the youth emerged from the cove.

He then directed the skiff toward the clump of shrubbery.

He had to push aside a mass of drooping vines ere he could see what had been hidden by this clump.

It proved to be the entrance of a broad water cavern.

"I thought so," muttered Dale. "But though it is wide enough for the light ship to enter, it is not high enough. She could not have passed into this place."

He directed the skiff into the cavern.

It was so dark there that he could not see the sides, until his eyes became used to the gloom.

Then he perceived that the cave was about ten feet high.

The sides were rugged, as also was the roof.

All was silence here.

On he went.

Further into the cavern did he rapidly penetrate.

All at once he saw light ahead. This proved to come down through an opening in the roof.

He saw in the side of the cavern some rugged stone steps.

He fastened the skiff by its warp to one of the projecting stones of which the steps were made, and ascended them.

He mounted fifteen steps.

Then he found himself in the apartment of an old ruin.

This had evidently been a convent.

The floor upon which he stood was made of square blocks of stone.

These were laid so that they formed a sort of arch over the square opening above the water cavern.

The room was a large one.

On both sides of the wall were many small windows.

Some yards ahead of him there was a wall in which was a stout, wooden door secured by a padlock.

Above the door was a small, square opening, evidently for the admittance of light and air.

Dale resolved to climb to this opening and look through it. He saw a beam standing against one of the walls.

This beam he brought and placed on end so he could climb it. In a few moments he had reached the opening.

He looked through it and could not repress a cry of surprise.

Here was evidently one of the secret retreats of the smugglers. Benches, chairs and tables were in the room.

Barrels and boxes were piled up in one corner.

These certainly were smuggled goods.

Dale crawled through the square opening, which was about ten feet above the floor.

He dropped down to the latter.

Then he advanced to the barrels and boxes.

These he soon ascertained were full.

He was still looking at them, when he heard a noise at the door.

It was made by the unlocking of the padlock.

Some one was about to enter the apartment.

As the door opened, Dale ensconced himself between two of the barrels.

The next moment the door was pushed back, and a light form glided into the room.

Peering from behind his place of concealment, Dale saw a beautiful young girl.

CHAPTER V.

A FRIEND.

THE girl upon whom the young midshipman gazed was not more than fourteen years of age.

She was of dark complexion, with large black eyes.

Her face was almost childish in expression, although, at the same time, full of womanly intelligence.

Her form was light and graceful, and she was tastefully though rather fancifully attired.

Her garb was of blue silk, and she wore over her shoulders a red scarf.

Her long, black ringlets brushed this scarf, and now and then she tossed them aside as she walked.

She went to a table, brushed it, and taking a plate, a knife and a fork from a shelf on the wall, she laid them neatly on the table.

Then from a cupboard she brought forth a ham, some cold sweet potatoes, a dish of fruit and some brown bread, which she also placed on the table.

Dale looked wistfully from his hiding-place at these preparations for a feast, and was half tempted to step forth.

But he believed it to be his duty to stay where he was and watch.

The girl having set the table, placed herself on a bench, drew a small book from her pocket, and commenced to read.

An hour had passed in this manner, when, all at once, voices fell upon the ears of the youth.

The girl started up, and replaced the book in her pocket.

A look of blended expectancy and fear was now upon her face.

Presently the door was opened, and the same fisherwoman who had overpowered Dale entered, accompanied by a youth of twenty.

The latter was a powerful, reckless-looking person, wearing a sort of watch-coat, and high boots reaching to his knees.

The coat open in front revealed a blue shirt with a broad collar.

The young fellow, though not handsome, had about him that jaunty air which is so pleasing to some women.

"Hi, there, Loo," said the fish-woman. "I see you have only set a place for one. I have brought Weston with me to-day, and I can tell you he is as hungry as a sea-wolf. So give him the best our larder affords, and season it with your sweetest smiles. Meanwhile, I may as well turn myself into a man now, as I'm tired of these lubberly garments!"

Then to Dale's surprise he saw the speaker throw off the female garb, which proved to conceal the sailor trousers and manly shape of the wearer.

In fact he was a man, and a very robust man at that.

His broad, full chest and well-rounded limbs denoted blended strength and activity.

His age might have been thirty, though, like most seamen, he looked to be older than he was.

The young man whom he had called Weston bowed to the girl, and made a motion as if he would take her hand.

But she drew back with a slight knitting of the brows, which evidently indicated dislike of the new-comer.

"Come, daughter, shake hands with him! Is this the way you treat the captain of my light-ship, which has ever been of such service to us? But for her warnings, your father would have been in prison before now."

To this remark the girl made no answer.

She simply went to the closet already spoken of, and, taking from it a plate, knife and fork, she placed them on the table.

"And where is the wine, Loo?" cried the elder man, impatiently. "Upon my word, you seem inclined to treat our guest shabbily enough."

"It matters not, Captain Watkins," said the other, though he looked displeased and angry. "I care not for wine at present. Let us talk business. As I told you, the gun-brig *Dolphin* is off this part of the coast looking for you."

Dale started.

Loo, the person disguised as a fisherwoman, was the noted smuggler, Ned Watkins.

Here was an important discovery, and the youth now hoped that the young man would say something to explain the mysterious disappearance of the light-ship in the bay, near the entrance of which he and Ray had seen her just before she so strangely vanished.

But the wishes of the youth were not destined to be gratified.

Not a word was uttered upon this subject.

The two outlaws now were seated at the table.

Presently they spoke in lowered tones, as if not desiring that the girl should hear what they said.

All at once, however, Watkins, looking quickly and keenly at her, said:

"Where is he?"

"What?"

"Where is he? Come, don't pretend ignorance. You know to whom I allude, girl."

"No, I do not."

"No trickery; no falsehood."

Tears rose to the girl's eyes.

"You insult me," she said. "Oh, how I wish you would let me go away from here."

"What! you would leave your father?"

"You know very well my name is Louisa Brand, and you are not my own father, but simply a distant relative. You and your wife adopted me. She was kind to me, but since her death I have longed only to leave this place."

"No; you know too much about me and my affairs to be permitted to go. If you do go, remember I shall find you, no matter where you may be, and I swear that I will kill you."

The girl shuddered and turned pale.

"I did not say I would go without your permission," she faltered.

"Well, you'd better not. And now answer me truly, where is that young officer—that midshipman?"

"I know not to whom you allude. I have seen no one during your absence."

"Oh, you haven't—eh? How happens it, then, that the skiff in which he came here was at the foot of the steps?"

"I know nothing about that. I have not noticed the skiff. I came in here from outside, and did not look down through the opening."

"Ay, ay, she tells the truth, sir," said Weston to the captain. "I would stake my life she does."

He looked at the smuggler's adopted daughter, as if expecting a glance of gratitude from her for taking her part, but she gave him none.

"In that case, the boy must be hiddensome where about the premises, without her knowledge," said Watkins.

The two men having finished their meal, started to their feet.

Each drew a pistol from his breast pocket.

Dale's heart beat rapidly.

He feared discovery, and having with him no weapon of defense, he regretted his temerity in hiding where he could be so easily found.

But the smugglers did not approach the goods.

In fact, Dale could not have selected a better place of concealment.

It did not occur to the outlaws that he would dare to seek so simple a hiding-place.

They moved in an opposite direction from that where lay the smuggled things.

Advancing to an old staircase leading to an upper floor, they ascended it.

They passed through an opening in the floor above them, to where broken altars and deep alcoves would in their opinion afford proper places for concealment.

No sooner were they out of sight than Dale emerged from between the barrels.

It chanced that Louisa—the outlaw's adopted daughter—was looking that way and saw him the moment he stepped forth.

She seemed about to cry out, but instantly checked herself.

The handsome, manly youth before her, pale and weary from his late hardships, roused her sympathy at once.

He advanced toward her.

"Would you be good enough to show me how I can escape?" he whispered.

Louisa colored deeply.

Then hearing the footsteps of the smugglers above, she realized there was no time to lose if she would save the boy.

"This way," she said. "They would see you from the windows above if you went outside."

Dale followed her.

She moved to the further side of the apartment, and raised with some exertion one of the lighter broad, flat stones with which the floor was paved.

An opening was thus revealed, having a flight of slimy stone steps.

"Go down there. They never use that vault," she said.

The midshipman thanked her and descended.

She replaced the flat stone, and pushing a heavy wooden chair upon it, she sat down on the chair.

A few minutes later her father and Weston re-appeared.

"It is very strange," said the former, "we cannot find him."

He looked sharply—suspiciously at his daughter as he spoke, but she calmly withstood the gaze.

Now that she really did know where the young officer was, she showed no emotion whatever.

But her heart beat rapidly.

"Come," said Watkins, "we must look for the fellow. Probably he left the ruin by the further door."

Having first looked among the smuggled goods, he quitted the building.

Weston, as he stood holding the door the other had opened, glanced toward Louisa, as if wanting to say good-bye.

To his joyful surprise, she said the words before him, and even smiled as she spoke.

He shut the door and hurried after Watkins with a light heart.

At the same moment Louisa heard beneath her a fierce, guttural growl like smothered thunder.

"It is Wolf!" she cried, in dismay. "I did not know father had put him there."

CHAPTER VI.

A SURPRISE.

On descending into the vault, after the girl had closed the slab above him, Dale found himself in nearly total darkness.

Through one small hole in the thick wall there entered a ray of light.

As the youth became more used to the obscurity, he could see the sides of the vault, which were damp and green with age.

The floor was of stone or cement.

It felt as wet as if water had been poured over it.

The sound of deep, low breathing came from behind a brick partition near the further side of the apartment.

Then a head was thrust forth.

It was apparently that of a Panama wolf, with huge, glaring eyes and sharp fangs.

The monster gave a spring, which brought his lank, powerful form in view.

He uttered a guttural growl, and made violent efforts to break from a not very strong rope, which held him to a ring in the brick-work.

To defend himself from this beast, in case of his breaking loose,

Dale had only his pocket-knife with a blade not more than five inches long.

He could perceive that the wolf was almost as fierce as if in its wild, untamed state.

Evidently Watkins usually kept it as a sort of watch-dog on the outside of the ruin to give notice of the approach of any stranger.

Louisa now raised the slab over the opening.

But ere she could call out to Wolf he, with one tremendous effort, broke the rope which held him and bounded toward the throat of the young sailor.

"Down, Wolf, down!" called Louisa, as Dale dodged the animal.

But the latter did not seem to heed her.

The midshipman sprang up the ladder.

"Here!" cried the girl, putting in his hand a small pistol which she had hastily pulled from the bosom of her dress. "It is loaded. The dog is mad!"

In fact the animal was frothing at the mouth, while his blazing eyes were of the color of green emeralds.

He ran round the vault as if looking for the youth.

Then he made a tremendous spring for the ladder.

As his dark body clove the air Dave fired.

The sharp report of the weapon was followed by one prolonged, hideous bark, as the wolf, shot through the head, fell struggling to the floor.

In a few moments he was dead,

Then Dale returned the still smoking pistol to the girl.

"Many thanks," he said, "but will not that noise betray me?"

"I think my father and his companion are too far off to hear it," replied Louisa. "In fact I think you can venture out for the present."

Through one of the small windows she could see the two men, now some distance from the ruin.

Dale stepped forth from the ladder.

"Take a seat at the table," said the girl, "and I will get you something to eat. I know you are both tired and hungry."

The young officer bowed, and complying with Louisa's directions, he was soon enjoying an excellent meal.

"You have been a good friend to me," he said, gratefully.

"They would kill you if they found you here. Of course I must do all I can to prevent that."

"The skiff is gone from the foot of the steps," said Dale, a moment later, as he looked down through the opening above the water-cavern.

"Yes, my father has probably concealed it in a hollow in the wall of the cavern."

"If I took to the boat I might go out to sea and run the chance of being picked up."

"You would incur the danger of being captured by the smugglers. But how came you here?"

Dale informed her, when she said:

"That sulphur pit is a perilous place. Several of the smugglers have been lost in it."

"I was very sorry to lose my companion. He was a kind as well as a brave officer."

"Had he not lost his life in that way, my father would, I fear, have killed him. He is a bad man, who would not hesitate at such a crime."

"Unintentionally I overheard enough while concealed behind the barrels to know that you are not his own child, and that you would be glad to leave him."

"I would, but I am afraid he would take my life if I went."

"You would have no cause to fear him were you once aboard my vessel—the *Dolphin*."

"I don't know. He is very powerful and has spies in many places. I fear that after I left your craft he would find me out."

"But we hope to capture him. I have no doubt we would, could I but get aboard the vessel again. I don't think she can be very far from here, and wish there was some high place whence I could watch for her."

"I know of a place. My father seldom goes there, but he might take a notion to do so, and then you would be discovered."

"I will have to risk that."

"Come, then, I will show you where it is."

Dale followed the young girl, who conducted him to the summit of the ruined tower.

Here he found himself in a sort of a belfry, overgrown with moss and with trailing vines on one side.

It commanded a good view of the sea, but the youth could at present discover no sign of a sail, although the weather was clear.

"Here—take this," said Louisa, presenting to him the small pistol which he had previously used and returned to her. "You may have occasion to resort to it. Here are some cartridges and caps," she added, taking a small box from her pocket, and also putting it in his hand.

"You must need these things yourself," he said, "or you would not have them. I cannot consent to deprive you of them."

"Nay—nay, you need have no scruples about that. I know where I can get more if I want them. I really have so far had no occasion to use them, and only kept them as a precaution—not knowing what might happen."

The youth thankfully accepted the weapon and cartridges; then in quitting him the girl continued:

"I will do all I can for your safety. I will see that you have provisions while you are here."

"Many thanks. I shall not feel satisfied until I rescue you from the hands of the smuggler."

"Were I so rescued I would go to live in peace the rest of my life with an old aunt in San Francisco. She wanted to take me after my parents died, but the smuggler's wife, my father's sister—came and carried me off."

As the girl spoke, Dale could not help liking her sweet, innocent voice.

Her beauty, of the brunette type, also pleased him.

She now closed the door after him, and he heard her light step, as she descended the winding stair.

Keeping a keen watch from his position, the youth finally saw a fog rising along the western seaboard.

It spread rapidly, and soon even the rocky cliff upon which the ruin stood, together with a thicket, extending on the right of it, was veiled from his sight.

Hours passed, when, all at once, Dale saw the dim outline of a man's form close to the ruin.

This man was running rapidly, as if pursued, and suddenly the boy heard the sound of shots and the whizzing of bullets.

The fugitive coming closer, Dale uttered a cry of surprise.

The person he saw was no other than Robert Ray, the master's mate, whom he had thought was lost in the sulphur pit.

Leaning out of the belfry opening, the youth cried out, in a half-suppressed voice:

"Mr. Ray! Mr. Ray!"

The latter heard him, and quickly looked upward.

"Dale," he replied, "is it indeed you I see?"

"Yes, sir. Go into the ruin and you will find a young girl, who will show you how to get up here."

"I am pursued, and don't think I would have the time. Here is a vine, I will trust to that."

Looking down to the right of the belfry, Dale saw the officer climbing to a ruined wall of the convent beneath.

He soon reached it, but he had still thirty feet more to climb.

The tendril of the vine leading up from this point looked to be too slender for a man's weight.

The youth had previously noticed an old coil of rope on the floor of the belfry.

He seized the end, lowered it, and fastened the other part to the frame which had once held the convent bell.

By means of this rope, which proved strong enough for the purpose, Ray soon reached the side of his friend, who then drew up the line.

At the same moment the outlines of the forms of half a dozen rough-looking fellows became visible rapidly approaching the ruin.

Dale and his companion then crouched out of sight, watching the men through a crevice in the woodwork.

CHAPTER VII.

DISCOVERED.

The men watched by the two officers were armed with pistols and cutlasses.

They stood motionless when near the ruin, looking carefully about them.

"They are some of the smugglers," whispered Dale.

"Yes, they have been pursuing me."

The men now entered the ruin.

"I hope they will not come this way," said Ray.

"I hope not," answered Dale. "I have only a small pistol, which would not keep them back."

The rough tones of the smugglers were heard, blended with the voice of Louisa.

Evidently she was trying to convince them that the fugitive had not entered the ruin.

The outlaws, probably after a brief search, left the premises.

From the belfry the two officers saw them enter the thicket.

Then Dale said to Ray:

"How is it I find you alive, sir? I was led to believe that you had fallen into the sulphur pit and perished."

"I did fall into it, but as I went I clutched a rocky protrusion on one side, and, finding myself opposite a narrow opening there, I crawled into it, when a breath of fresh air partly revived me."

"It was some time, however, before I was strong enough to creep forward. When, at last, I had strength to do so, I crawled along, keeping my mouth toward the fresh air, and at length I emerged upon the beach from the other end of the passage."

"This was partly concealed by shrubbery, but on pushing that aside I found myself near the place where I had left you."

"I was surprised at not seeing you."

"I moved on, climbed to the top of the precipice, and looked about me."

"Not a living soul could I see, but in the distance I noticed the ruin of the convent."

"I crept between two rocks, and sat watching the sea, hoping to sight a sail which I could signal."

"At last a fog came, and just as it became thick I heard approaching footsteps and also voices."

"As these people were coming toward me, I knew I would be discovered. I waited, however, until they were near enough for me to judge by their garb that they were smugglers, when I rose and beat a rapid retreat. They saw me and pursued, as you have seen."

Dale then described his meeting with Watkins, disguised as a fisherman, and his subsequent experiences.

"Have you inquired of the girl you speak of about that mysterious light-ship?"

"No, but I intend to the next time I see her."

Just then a step was heard on the stairs, and a moment later Louisa opened the door of the belfry.

She had with her some provisions and a jug of water.

She did not seem surprised at seeing Dale's companion.

Evidently she had heard the shots that were fired, and, looking from the ruin, had observed Ray climbing toward the belfry.

"Glad enough I am to get something to eat," said the master's mate. "But can you tell me what those people of the light-ship have done with their craft? My friend and I saw the vessel at the entrance of the bay, and when we looked at the bay, only a few minutes later, she had disappeared."

"I dare not tell the secrets of the smugglers," answered the girl — "at least not while I am here. Not only would I be killed, but I would first be tortured should they discover I had spoken of these things, and —"

Ere she could say another word, heavy steps were heard ascending the stairs.

Then the rough voice of Watkins thus saluted the ears of the trio:

"Ah, I believe she has betrayed us—that she has the rascals somewhere in hiding about the ruin. You are sure you saw her mounting the steps with the provisions?"

"I could take my oath to it," was answered, in a voice which the girl recognized as that of a youth whom she knew was often deputed to act as a spy.

"God help you!" she whispered to the officers. "They have learned that you are here and you are lost."

The footsteps came every moment nearer.

Ray drew his sword, and Dale cocked the pistol with which the girl had provided him.

"Stand back!" cried the youth, as he leveled his weapon toward

Watkins, who now appeared at the head of the stairway. "If you come another step, I will put a bullet through your head!"

There was only room for one person at a time to enter the belfry.

Watkins, knowing this, resolved to run the risk of standing Dale's fire, while he discharged the pistol he held.

Quickly he pulled the trigger, but as he did so Louisa caught his arm, disturbing his aim.

Then the whizzing of the bullet was heard, as it cut the air close to the ears of the youth.

The latter, fearing to hit Louisa, who was close to the smugglers' captain, had not fired.

Watkins, with a savage cry, thrust aside the girl's arm.

At the same moment Dale, bounding forward, struck the captain on the head with the butt of his pistol, momentarily stunning him.

As he staggered to one side, Weston squeezed past him and raised a cutlass to deal the young midshipman a stroke with it.

But the youth dodged the weapon, which otherwise must have nearly severed his head from his shoulders.

Then pointing his pistol at the young outlaw's brow, he pulled the trigger.

As he did so, Weston ducked his head, avoiding the shot, which passed through the shoulder of another of the smugglers, who was pressing up to assist his companion.

With a horrid scream the man fell backward, involuntarily clutching Weston by the collar as he went.

"Away, away for your lives!" cried the girl. "More of the smugglers are coming up the staircase."

Dale understood that she meant for him to make use of the rope—the only means of leaving the belfry.

One end, as already stated, was fastened to the bell frame.

The young officer, lowering the other part, said to Ray:

"Quick, sir! You go first! I will follow!"

Seeing that to object now would only cause delay, Ray complied.

He rapidly descended the rope, which was long enough to enable him to reach the ruined wall below.

Dale followed.

Just then they heard a loud voice above:

"Stand where you are, or you are both dead men!"

Looking up, they saw Weston aiming a double-barreled rifle toward them.

He had evidently snatched the piece from one of his companions, who had arrived.

Dale stood motionless.

He whispered to Ray:

"Climb down by the vines, from the wall. The smuggler can only shoot one of us at a time. You are my superior officer. Go and save yourself!"

"I'll be hung first!" answered Ray. "You go! Come! it is your duty to obey my orders!"

"Ay, ay, sir! but I'll disobey this one, even if I'm court-martialed for it!" answered Dale.

So saying, and before Ray could prevent him, he seized him by the collar with one hand, and, by a dexterous movement of his foot, shoved the feet of the other from the edge of the wall.

Down went Ray, and as he went Dale let go of his collar.

The officer fell as straight as a plumb-line, and landed on his feet about four yards below.

Bang! went the rifle at the same moment.

The bullet whizzed close to the head of the master's mate, and, grazing his shoulder, struck the rock under him.

Weston had fired one barrel of his rifle.

The next moment Ray, crouching behind an angle of the wall, was safe from another shot.

"Climb up!" shouted Weston to the midshipman. "Come, you are in my power now."

"Very well," answered Dale.

Ray at the same time heard a rush of feet through an open doorway not far from him.

This was the doorway opening from the apartment below, and he knew that some of the outlaws were coming to capture him.

As he could not benefit Dale by remaining where he was, he ran along the base of the ruined wall, screened by the thick fog, looking for some place of concealment.

All at once he stumbled over a stone, and felt himself going head downward into an opening.

He threw out his arms, and his hands came in contact with a rope.

To this he clung, but the rope was slimy, and his hands slipping along it, his descent was continued.

Finally, after going down many fathoms, he found himself up to his waist in water, with his feet on a sandy ground.

Then he realized that he was at the bottom of a deep well.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WELL.

DALE, seizing the rope hanging from the belfry, commenced to climb it.

His progress, however, was purposely very slow.

"Come, hurry, or I will send a bullet through the top of your head," cried Weston.

"My arms are sprained, and I can climb no faster. If you are in a hurry, why don't you or your companions pull me up?"

"That we will speedily do, my hearty!" cried Weston. "Glad to see you have come to terms, at last! Nothing like a rifle to 'fix' you 'younglings' of the navy!"

He put down the rifle as he spoke, and told the smugglers, who stood in a line behind him, to take hold of the rope and haul.

But scarcely had they seized the rope, when Dale showed his real purpose in inducing the outlaws to grasp the rope.

Swinging himself outward, he suddenly dropped from the line.

"Hah! the tricky young scamp! He has baulked us after all!" cried Weston.

Dale, when he let go of the rope, was about three feet above the wall, so that he now had a fall of about five yards.

But as he alighted upon his feet, he was only jarred by the drop.

For a few moments, however, the power was thus taken out of his legs to move.

The smugglers who were in pursuit of Ray from below had gone past the spot, otherwise he would easily have been made a prisoner.

He contrived, before Weston could repossess himself of his rifle, to get behind the angle of the wall.

Then, as he regained the use of his limbs, he ran along in the same direction Ray had taken.

Fortunately the outlaw in pursuit of the latter had passed the well, thinking the fugitive was keeping on ahead of them.

Dale reaching the opening, paused by the brink of it.

It struck him that this might prove a good hiding-place for the present.

He therefore seized the rope and commenced to descend by it.

But when he was within five feet of the bottom the rope, which was a rotten one, broke far above.

Down went the youth, falling directly astraddle of the shoulders of Ray, with a force which caused the latter to tumble over.

"Ay, now, what the mischief is that?" cried the startled officer.

In a moment he had shaken off the living burden, and drawing his sword, he had the point at the breast of the youth as he rose sputtering from the water.

Dale now was in imminent danger of strangulation, not only from laughter, but from the water which he had gulped into his throat.

"Ray! Ray!" he contrived to gasp out between his bursts of mirth as the water spouted from his mouth and nostrils. "Do—do—don't you—oh—oh—know me?"

"How the deuce am I to know you, here in the dark?" responded Ray. "Who are you? Yield, you rascal, or I will run you through!"

This was too much for Dale.

A perfect fountain of water spouted from his nostrils, and the sound of his laughter was like the blowing of a young porpoise.

"I—I—ah—I—ah—I am Da—Da—Dale!" he contrived to sputter out at last.

"Dale?" cried Ray, instantly sheathing his sword. "Ah, I beg your pardon. I thought you must be one of those smugglers. I am so glad you escaped from the scoundrels! I thought they had you fast!"

The youth explained in a few words.

"And now," he added, "here we are thirty feet or so at the bottom of an old well. How are we to get out?"

"God only knows!" said Ray. "One thing is certain, I shall starve to death if I don't soon have some food."

"There's none down here, that's certain," answered Dale.

"Halloa! I'm not so sure of that," cried Ray, as his body came in contact with a large, dangling tin pail. "What is this? Milk?"

"You think some one has lowered a kettle of milk into the well to keep it cool? I should not be surprised if such is the case."

Ray lifted the kettle and took off the cover.

A pleasant odor came from the pail.

"Try and light a match, Dale."

The youth took one from a rubber match-safe he always carried, and contrived to light it by rubbing it against a ribbed blade of his pocket-knife.

In this damp place the match quickly went out, but not until Ray had discovered that the kettle contained a couple of roasted wild fowl.

"Glory!" he cried. "Here's a treat."

He shared the fowl with Dale, who, however, ate very sparingly of it.

It was delicious, and, having been kept in so cool a place, was as if it had been on ice.

"Whoever put that kettle here will come for it," said the youth. "We must be careful how we speak, lest we be heard and discovered."

"Ay, that's true. The kettle is hung by a slender line, not much thicker than twine. Were it only a little stronger we might be able to climb by it from the well."

"It would be a pretty hard climb, but I think we could do it if the rope were thicker."

"Certainly we could."

"We are in very uncomfortable quarters. Ugh! the water is cold!"

"Yes, sir—we must get out of the place in some way."

"But how?"

Dale felt of one side of the well.

The stones projecting in places would afford a foothold.

Hours passed.

All at once the twain heard a sort of roaring noise.

"What on earth is that?" cried Ray.

The other listened awhile, and then, feeling drops of water descending on his hand, he said:

"It is rain, and a heavy fall, too, I should judge by the noise."

Presently Ray spoke again.

"Is not the water higher than it was? It was up to my waist before, and now it reaches nearly to my breast!"

"Yes, the water is rising in the well."

"I am afraid we are lost," said Ray.

Dale tried if he could climb by the stones in the side of the well.

He found he could ascend only about two feet.

Then the stones upon which he stood gave way, and down he came, plumping back into the water.

At the same moment, from the place where one of the fallen stones had been, two little gleaming points, like diamonds, were seen in the gloom.

Then there was a hissing sound, and the next moment the youth felt something coiling about his neck.

"A serpent!" he cried. "There's a serpent about my neck, Mr Ray!"

The master's mate unsheathed his sword.

By the gleam of the serpent's eyes, he knew the location of the head, and with a quick blow he brought the edge of the weapon across the neck of the reptile.

It was severed, and the two officers heard the head drop into the water.

But it was a full minute ere Dale could free himself from the loathsome coil.

Meanwhile the water continued to rise.

It was soon up to the chins of the two sailors, who were about of equal height.

Presently it rose to their ears.

They strove to climb the side of the well, which Dale had not yet attempted.

But the loose stones gave way beneath their feet.

There was no hope of their escaping their dreadful fate in this manner.

They were now obliged to swim, for the water had reached their lips.

For an hour did they continue to keep their heads above the surface.

By that time both were exhausted.

All at once, just as Ray was about sinking, the kettle swung against his shoulder.

Some one above was evidently drawing it up.

The officer, looking upward, beheld the face of the smuggler's daughter at the opening.

"Halloa! halloa!" he cried faintly.

Dale looked up, and not being quite so exhausted as his companion, enabled to call louder.

The girl heard him.

"Who is that?" she inquired.

"It is I—the midshipman, Dale. Can you not lower a rope to us? We are sinking!"

Louisa gave a cry of blended surprise and concern.

"Try to keep up a few moments longer," she said, "and I will help you."

She quickly hauled up the kettle.

A minute passed, then another.

"No use, I can float no longer," said Ray.

As he spoke he sank.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LIGHT-SHIP.

DALE caught Ray by the collar, and with a great deal of exertion managed to get his head above the surface.

At that moment something quickly descending touched his shoulder.

He knew by the feeling that it was a rope.

Louisa had returned to the mouth of the well and lowered this line.

Dale quickly fastened it, first about the breast of his companion—then about his own.

"We can now hang to the rope until we get rested," he said. "Then we can climb it gradually, bracing ourselves against the side of the well as we ascend."

Supported by the water as they hung to the rope, the two officers were finally strong enough to commence the ascent.

Hand over hand they climbed, Dale above and Ray just below him.

By now and then bracing themselves against the side of the well, they were enabled to keep on without becoming exhausted.

But it was a long time ere their heads emerged through the opening above.

"Thank God! you are saved from a dreadful fate!" cried Louisa, as they sprang out.

"Only to meet another, probably," said Ray, "but I thank you for what you have done."

"All the smugglers have left the ruin to look for you," said the girl. "But the shower we have just had has cleared the fog, as you can perceive, and they are apt to see you, if they are lurking anywhere near here."

"Perhaps we had better go back to the ruin," said Dale.

"Oh, no. My father and his men may come back at any moment. I have been preparing supper for them. That is how I came to be at the well. The wild fowl in the kettle was for my father."

"He'll lose his hash, then," said Dale, laughing. "My friend here is responsible for that."

"What shall we do?" inquired Ray. "Which way had we better go?"

Louisa seemed to reflect for several moments.

"There is no help for it," she said, at last. "For your sakes I will disclose the mystery of the light-ship. It is the only way to save your lives. But I will have to go with you. Otherwise my father, already incensed against me for helping you, will kill me."

"Have no fear," said Dale. "We will both risk our lives to protect you."

"Come," said Louisa, "we have no time to lose."

She led the way, and following her, the two officers soon found themselves at the foot of the steps leading up into the ruin from the water-cavern.

Louisa, as lightly as a fawn, ran along a ledge extending from the

steps, and soon drew from a small cove the skiff which Dale had previously occupied.

The officers, followed by the girl, entered the skiff.

"Paddle out of the cavern," said Louisa.

Complying with the directions of the fair pilot, Dale urged the boat toward the mouth of the cave, and soon emerged into the bay, which has already been alluded to.

"Keep on," said the girl.

When the skiff was in the middle of the bay, she took the paddle from Dale, and backing water with it, brought the boat to a stop.

There was but a light breeze, and scarcely a ripple disturbed the surface of the water here.

"Look!" said Louisa, pointing downward.

Her companions, gazing awhile into the nearly clear depths, could not repress a simultaneous cry of surprise.

At first they had been able to see only the yellowish gleam of the water. Gradually, however, they made out the three low masts, and also the hull of the light-ship, down in the depths.

"Sunk! the vessel is lost!" said Dale.

"Sunk, but not lost!" quietly answered the girl.

"How?" inquired Ray. "I cannot understand that."

"By a very simple contrivance the vessel can be sunk at the will of her captain," answered Louisa.

"Her single hatchway, leading into the cabin and the hold, has a water-tight covering, which is also air-tight. Attached to the bottom of the vessel there is a bell-shaped arrangement, made of metal, at the top of which there is an opening, also containing an air-tight covering."

"But how do they sink the craft?" inquired Ray.

"By raising the covering at the top of the bell, which is in the center of the lower hold. The craft then sinks under water, but, owing to the resistance of the air, goes down beneath the surface only a certain distance. This leaves the hold perfectly dry and free from water."

"But how do those who remain in the hold obtain a supply of fresh air? They must have that."

"The crew do not remain in the vessel when they sink it here in the bay," answered Louisa. "One man goes into the hold, raises the air-tight covering, and as the vessel begins to settle down he runs on deck through the hatchway, puts the covering over it, and jumps into a boat alongside, containing the rest of the crew, who then pull for land. When out at sea, if they have occasion to sink the craft, which is very seldom, they arrange a hose so that the top, projecting above the water, admits air enough to them while they are in the hold."

"There is no one aboard the ship now?"

"No."

"How can you get aboard, while the craft is under water?"

"Very easily, if you can swim, you will have to dive down under the bell, and rise up inside of it to the lower hold."

"And when there how are we to raise the ship to the surface?"

"Simply by replacing the covering over the opening in the lower hold, at the top of the keel, and then a wooden bar, which you will see near it. This bar by means of certain machinery connected with it works a paddle attached to the craft in such a way that it pushes the vessel upward. As soon as it reaches the surface it remains there."

"A queer contrivance," said Ray, looking a little doubtful.

"Come," said Dale, "I am ready to make the venture."

"If you go, I'll go with you," cried Ray.

"And I'll remain in the skiff," said Louisa. "When the vessel reaches the surface, I will get aboard."

The two officers took off their hats, coats and shoes.

Then they dove.

Both were expert swimmers and divers.

Keeping their eyes open under water, they saw the metal surface of the bell, and as it was not very long they soon reach the under rim of it, beneath which they swam and rose on the inside.

Up they went, and soon arrived at the surface, with their heads now projecting into the lower hold.

"How curious!" said Ray, as they crawled from the opening to the floor of the hold.

"Yes, sir—a very curious arrangement," said Dale.

"There is the bar," cried Ray, pointing a strong wooden projection attached to an object having something of the appearance of a pump.

"We have no time to lose," said Dale. "It is suffocating down here. We need fresh air."

As he spoke he seized the bar, which he found easy to move.

It worked like a pump handle, and he heard a rushing sound which was evidently caused by the paddle of which the girl had spoken.

The vessel, buoyant as a cork, rose quickly to the surface, and Ray, having closed the opening in the lower hold, the craft now floated upright.

The two officers moved up a staircase they saw leading to the hatchway.

They then easily raised the air-tight covering, which, like the one below, was made of thick, tough rubber.

Emerging on deck, they saw Louisa a few yards off in the skiff.

She smiled, and directed the light craft alongside.

Then, with her usual agility, having thrown the warp of the skiff to Dale, who caught it and made it fast to a pin, she seized the main chain plates and mounted the low side of the craft.

Leaping lightly from the rail to the deck, she said to Dale:

"You should get under way at once."

The vessel carried only courses and topsails, together with a stay-sail and a jib.

The two officers, after they had donned their upper garments and shoes which they had left in the skiff ere they dove, contrived to loosen and set the courses.

"I will take the wheel and steer," said the girl.

"What! you know how to steer?" cried Dale.

"Oh, yes. My father taught me that. He has often taken me with him aboard his schooner."

The youth followed her to the wheel.

The breeze was freshening, and Louisa kept the craft along nicely, heading out to sea.

"You spoke of Watkins' schooner," said Dale. "Where is that schooner?"

"In a concealed bay not far from here. You will probably soon see her in pursuit. As the weather is clear, some of the smugglers, who are always on the lookout aboard of her, will notice the light-ship going out to sea."

"This light-ship belongs also to Watkins, does she not?"

"Yes. He has her cruising about as a 'spy,' not far from him, whenever he is on his way with a cargo. She makes signals to him, and thus notifies him of the vicinity of any government craft when he is not in a position to see it. This she does chiefly at night."

"We might manage to loosen and set the topsails," remarked Ray to Dale.

"Yes, you will need all your sail to escape the schooner, which is a swift craft," said the girl.

The officers loosened the topsails, but their strength was unsufficient to enable them to hoist the yards as high as they should have been raised.

The bell attached to the bottom of the vessel operated as a sort of drag, somewhat deadening her speed.

"A clumsy craft," said Ray.

"Ay, sir. We will never escape the schooner with such a vessel when she pursues us."

The wind, however, freshening, forced the craft steadily on her way.

Suddenly the booming of a small carronade was heard, and a puff of smoke was seen curling up among some of the rocks on a certain part of the coast.

"We are seen," cried Louisa. "That signal is to notify Watkins that something is wrong."

CHAPTER X.

A CHASE IN THE DARK.

"BEFORE Watkins can reach the schooner and get under way, we will be some distance out to sea," said Ray.

"Ay, and I hope we may see the *Dolphin*, sir," cried Dale.

"Little chance of that, I'm afraid," said Ray, "although she should be somewhere near this part of the coast."

Dale ran aloft and scanned the broad expanse of waters.

Far away on the western seaboard lay a fog-bank, but no craft was in sight.

The sun now was low in the heavens, the edge of the planet's disc just touching the fog-bank.

"If the schooner does not come up with us before night, we may contrive to escape her in the dark," said Dale.

"Meanwhile suppose we have something to eat. This young lady must be hungry, too."

"I have been to supper," she answered. "Go below into the cabin, and in the pantry I doubt not you will find cold meats and other eatables."

Ray and the midshipman went below.

The cabin was an uncarpeted room, poorly furnished.

There was, however, a table there and a few chairs.

From the pantry the officers brought forth a cold ham, some bread, and several bottles of cider.

"These never paid duty, I dare say," remarked Ray, alluding to the bottled cider, "but under the circumstances, government officers though we are, I think we are justified in partaking of the contents."

"That is my opinion too," said Dale laughing.

They soon had the ham and bread before them, and uncorking the bottles, they made a tolerable meal.

When they had finished it they went on deck.

The schooner was not yet in pursuit of them.

They looked toward the land, and Dale then said to the girl:

"How many men do they have to man this vessel?"

"Ten, usually, under command of Weston."

"He seems to be a very desperate character," said Dale.

"He is," answered the girl, shrugging her shoulders. "And yet he was taken from among the crew of a coasting vessel which was wrecked off the coast. Watkins induced him to join his band, but his shipmates—three men who had also managed to swim ashore from the wreck—refused."

"And what became of them?"

"They were killed," answered Louisa, with a shudder.

"Is that how Watkins treats those who will not join him?"

"Yes, and that is why he calls that part of the shore the 'Death Coast.' All sailors who come upon him and his party he puts to death if they refuse to serve him."

An hour passed ere the schooner was seen coming out of the bay in pursuit.

"There she is at last," cried Ray.

She was as sharp as a sword-fish, and carried besides her fore-and-aft mainsail and foresail and main-gaff-topsail, a square fore-topsail and a to'gallant-sail.

"She sails like the wind," said Ray, uneasily.

"It is now dusk, and she cannot come up with us before night, sir," said Dale.

"True, and it is going to be a dark night, which will help us."

In fact, the schooner was still a league distant, when darkness closed upon the sea.

The smuggler showed no lantern, so that it was impossible for the three occupants of the light-ship to determine her location.

They had changed her course, hoping thus to elude her, and, as hour after hour passed, it seemed as if they might be successful.

Neither of the officers thought of sleep.

Dale, having insisted on relieving the girl at the wheel, in order that she might seek below the rest and repose she needed, cast watchful glances about the craft, as he stood steering at the helm, in the light breeze which was now falling away.

Ray, forward at the bow, was also keeping a keen lookout.

All at once, directly off the lee bow, he saw something looming through the gloom.

"Sail, O!" he cried in a low but clear voice that reached the ears of Dale. "I think it is the schooner. Luff, there! Down helm and luff!"

Dale obeyed. But now the canvas began to shake violently with a noise which must have been heard by the occupants of the craft off the lee bow.

Ray endeavored to pull in the lee braces, and Dale, steadying the ship, ventured to leave the wheel long enough to assist him.

The yards were not heavy ones, and worked easily, so that the twain succeeded in bracing them up pretty sharp.

But, as the youth returned to the wheel, and the light-ship now forged along on her changed course, voices were heard aboard the other craft, together with the creaking of yards, indicating that her course also was being altered.

"Here she comes. I can see her outline through the gloom!" said

Ray to Dale. "She is the schooner, and will be swooping upon us like a falcon before many minutes!"

Presently a rushing sound was heard close off the light-ship's weather quarter.

Then there was the gleam of several lanterns, and the light from them flashed along the decks and upon the canvas of the schooner, not two ships' lengths off.

Upon the quarter-deck was seen the form of Watkins, with a trumpet in his hand, and several men were also noticed about a carronade, which was now observed in the open gangway, pointed toward the ship.

The course of the schooner was at present the same as that of the ship, and running along parallel with her, she was only about fifty fathoms off.

"Light-ship ahoy!" roared Watkins.

"Ahoy!" answered Ray. "What do you want?"

"You know well enough. Heave to at once, or we will give you a shot."

The schooner being, as stated, a fast vessel, was meanwhile forging ahead.

"Don't answer him, sir," said Dale. "I don't think he will care to fire and damage this ship, as it is one of his own vessels."

"Stand by to keep off, Dale," said Ray. "I'll delay him as long as I can from boarding us, which I believe to be his intention."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I wouldn't advise you to fire," continued Ray, speaking to Watkins. "You will only damage your own craft."

"I know what I am about," replied Watkins. "Come! are you going to heave to or not?"

The schooner now had forged some fathoms ahead of the ship.

Without replying to Watkins, Ray leaned over toward Dale and said:

"Keep off! Up with the wheel, and help me square in the yards." Dale obeyed.

He raised the wheel, and as the craft swung off, he put it amidships. Then he ran to assist the master's mate.

The weather braces were pulled in and the light-ship was thus headed away from the schooner.

Before the latter could be kept off the ship was out of sight of the smugglers, in the gloom.

But the sound of moving yards betokened that the schooner was being put in her wake.

"They are after us," said Dale. "Here they come."

In fact the lights of the schooner were seen rapidly advancing through the darkness.

Both the officers had now given up all hope of being able to escape the outlaws.

Dale was again at the wheel, and Ray stood near him, when all at once they imagined they heard a shout ahead of them.

The master's mate ran to the bow and peered through the gloom.

"What is it sir?" cried Dale.

"I cannot exactly make out, but I think it is a boat."

"Ay, a boat previously lowered from the schooner to head us off, probably," said Dale.

"I think so," was the answer. "Keep off a little more and we may escape him."

Dale obeyed.

At the same moment the shout was repeated, now quite close to the craft.

As Ray peered through the darkness, it seemed to him that the outline of the boat had the appearance of that of a cutter.

"Boat ahoy! Who are you?" called the master's mate.

"Coxswain Thomas of the *Dolphin*!" was the response.

"Down with that wheel, Dale!" cried Ray, running aft. "These are friends!"

He spoke in a low but distinct voice, as he had done in hailing the boat, so the people aboard the schooner could not hear what he said.

With Dale's assistance he braced the mizzen and head-yards, and as the light-ship swung up into the wind the cutter glided alongside, and soon its occupants were aboard, with their boat made fast by its warp to the main-chains.

"Come into the cabin, all of you!" said Ray.

They descended into the cabin, when Ray lighted a lantern there.

"I did not want to show a light on deck as we are being chased by a smuggler, which is close aboard of us," he said.

The gleam of the lantern flashed upon the familiar faces of Coxswain Thomas and his crew of twelve men—all of them armed with cutlasses.

They belonged to the same cutter from which Ray and Dale had swam to the raft on the night before.

"Thank God!" said Ray, "for this unexpected help. I hope now to be able to capture the smugglers and their craft!"

CHAPTER XI.

TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

As Ray spoke he ran up to the deck and took a look at the schooner's lights.

The breeze now had fallen away almost to a calm, so that fully a quarter of an hour must elapse ere the smugglers could come up with the ship.

Returning to the cabin, Ray said to the coxswain:

"Well, how happens it you are here? When Dale and I left you, you were fast, by a line, to the *Dolphin*."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Thomas. "But when the squall came up we were afraid you and Mr. Dale were in great peril, so I let go the rope and went to look for you."

"In such a blow, however's, we couldn't find you, and we've been a-drifting about ever since."

"Several times we were near being 'capsized,' sir, but we managed to keep afloat by great exertion. We looked for the *Dolphin*, but not being able to find her, I concluded it was best to make for the coast. Now, sir, may I venture to ask how you contrived to save yourself and how you come to be aboard this ere queer craft?"

"Certainly, Thomas," answered Ray, and in a few words he described his and Dale's adventures since they left the cutter.

"Well, sir, I think we might show them smugglers a good fight, even though it'll be on empty stomachs. All we've had to eat, sir, has been a few biscuits which was in the boat and ain't there no longer."

"I think you will have time to eat something before the smugglers come up with us," answered Ray. "Go to the pantry and help yourselves."

The pantry being ransacked, its contents, consisting of some cold meat and potatoes, together with a jug of cider, were soon on the table.

The hungry men eat like wolves and speedily cleared the board.

"Now, sir, there's some strength in us," remarked the coxswain, as he stroked his stomach. "Our hearts is in the right place—eh, lads?" addressing the men.

"Ay, ay, ay," was the prompt response, and as he spoke every man laid his hand on his stomach.

"I'm glad to hear it, boys," said Ray, "for there'll be warm work for you presently."

Having been awakened by the racket, Louisa now opened the door of the room in which she had been asleep, and came shyly forth.

In an instant every one of the gruff seamen withdrew respectfully to one side.

Ray advanced, and said to the girl:

"I have, as you see, been fortunate enough to pick up my cutter's crew. Will you tell me how many men the schooner usually carries?"

"Eighteen, I believe," she replied.

"Come and bring your men on deck, coxswain," ordered Ray. He went up, followed by the cutter's people.

The schooner's light by this time was close aboard.

"Ahoy, there!" hailed Watkins.

"Ahoy!" responded Ray.

"Have you hove to?"

"Ay, ay! I hope you'll treat us well, if you capture us."

Something like a laugh was heard to issue from the schooner.

"Oh, of course," replied Watkins. "We are no navy 'birds' to harm our prisoners."

Again there was a smothered laugh.

Just then the flapping of the schooner's canvas was heard.

The wind had entirely fallen away.

A calm was now upon the sea.

The sound of a boat being lowered was heard.

By the gleam of the lantern which was lighted, as she approached a dozen men could be seen in the boat.

Weston was in the stern-sheets.

"I wish it had been Watkins," said Ray. "But never mind, we'll have them all, if this calm only holds."

"They appear to be armed. All have cutlasses," said Dale. "It looks as if they knew of our reinforcements."

"They cannot know about them. They could not see the boat's crew board us in the dark. Jump in the cutter, one of you," he added, "and pull the cutter round under the bow, so that those fellows cannot see her when they come alongside."

A nimble sailor soon performed this duty.

Then Ray ordered his men to crouch down in the deep gloom of the rail, near the gangway.

He did the same, and all the men held their drawn cutlasses in a firm grasp.

On came the unsuspecting smugglers, and soon the boat glided alongside.

"Follow me, my lads," cried Weston, as he sprang aboard. "Where are you?" he called, "you two naval officers? Show yourselves, or it will be the worse for you!"

There was no response.

"Here—one of you—bring up the boat's lantern!" said Weston, turning to his men.

A sailor descended into the boat and brought up the lantern.

"Here we are!" cried Dale, now showing himself from behind the mizzen-mast, as had been agreed upon between him and Ray.

Instantly Weston pointed a pistol at the youth.

But as he fired Louisa, who had emerged from the cabin, knocked up his arm, and the bullet whizzed over the head of the youth.

"Now, boys, let them have it," shouted Ray, in a voice of thunder.

These sudden words, followed by the rush of the man-of-war's men upon the smugglers, so took the latter by surprise, that, for a moment, they were incapable of striking a blow.

Several of them made a feeble show of resistance, but they were quickly slain, and now the others fled aft.

"Yield! throw down your swords," shouted Ray, "or we will cut you to pieces!"

But Weston, regaining his self-possession, cried out, in a determined voice:

"Now, boys, you must fight—fight as you never fought before. Remember that you must all swing if you are captured."

These words seemed to infuse spirit and resolution into the hearts of the outlaws.

They wielded their blades and fought with the utmost determination.

But their practiced opponents warded their blows, and struck with a skill and steadiness which soon reduced their number to but six men, including Weston.

The latter, striking out right and left, had slightly wounded several of his assailants, when Dale, with a powerful blow, severed his cutlass to the hilt.

But, drawing a dagger, the young outlaw now sprang under the youth's guard and grasped him by the throat. Down came the sharp steel, which would have been buried to the haft in his breast had not he twisted himself to one side.

At the same time Coxswain Thomas, swiftly passing his blade through the smuggler's body, fairly pinned him to the mizzen-mast, where he expired in a moment.

But five of the outlaws now remained alive, and as their leader perished, they sullenly threw down their cutlasses in token of surrender.

Ray had gained his victory without the loss of a man on his side, although several were wounded.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

THE noise of the combat had reached the ears of Watkins.

Surprised and startled, he peered from the rail of his vessel, vainly striving to pierce the obscurity, which was increased by a slight mist that had gathered.

That something unusual had occurred he was certain.

By the sounds of strange voices he presently divined that the two naval officers aboard the light-ship had been reinforced.

This was also the opinion of the first mate—an unprincipled villain named Jacob Goff.

"Better take a boat and make off, sir," he said. "As we have no wind, we cannot escape in any other way."

"Fool! What are you saying?" replied Watkins. "How do you know that our side may not be victorious?"

"I judge by sounds," answered Goff. "Hark! did you hear that Weston telling his men to fight or they'll have to swing?"

"Ay, sir, and you'll have to swing if you don't show more pluck!" cried Watkins.

But very soon the captain heard enough to guess that his own party had been vanquished, for one of them cried out: "Boys, the naval fellows have the best of us! May as well give in!"

"What do you say now?" inquired Goff.

"I say that we have a carronade which with one shot can spoil the fun of those naval dogs!"

Then, turning to the eight men who had remained aboard the schooner, and who now looked rather dejected, he ordered them to stand by the carronade and keep a sharp lookout for any approaching boat.

Meanwhile Ray had ordered the decks of the light-ship to be cleared of the bodies of the slain smugglers.

By the gleam of the lanterns, which had been previously lighted to enable the man-of-war's men to distinguish friends from foes during the combat, the dead were taken up and launched into the sea.

"Now for the schooner," said Ray. "I hope to soon capture her and her master, and thus put an end to the career of the smuggler Watkins!"

"Be careful, sir," said Louisa, who from the hatchway ladder had been a spectator of the late combat. "Remember they have a carronade aboard that craft."

"They cannot fire it from each side of the schooner at once," replied Ray smiling. "I intend to attack them both on the port and the starboard side."

"I am to have command of one of the boats, I hope?" said Dale.

"Yes, sir. You shall take the smuggler's boat and I the cutter."

The men soon were divided into two parties, composed of five men, besides their commanders.

The two who had been most severely wounded were to be left aboard of the light-ship.

Louisa looked a little anxious as Dale put off in the smuggler's boat with his men.

"Be careful!" she said to him. "Keep out of range of the guns."

At this Dale laughed, while at the same time he answered, lifting his cap:

"I will be as careful as I can, although I will have to own that a shot cannot be very well dodged, and that it is sometimes not possible to keep out of the range of one."

Then the light-hearted boy, bowing to the girl, sat down by the side of the tar who acted as his coxswain.

As the boats approached the schooner it was impossible to guess the location of the carronade in the gloom, for Watkins now was careful to show no light.

A dead silence reigned aboard the schooner as the two boats were rowed on.

They were within about twenty fathoms of the vessel, when all at once there was a broad, bright flash from the gun.

It was easy to see its position now there in the port gangway.

With a "bur-r-r-ing" sound the shot passed close to the stern of the cutter—so close as to graze the cap of the master's mate.

"Now, boys, with a will, before they can load again," shouted Ray.

The men bent to their oars with a strength and power that made the cutter fairly fly through the water.

But, just as they were close under the gangway, Watkins had succeeded in loading the gun again.

There it was depressed so that the muzzle pointed toward the center of the cutter.

"My God, sir, we are lost!" whispered the coxswain to Ray.

"Fire!" roared Watkins, at the same moment.

But, as the lock-string was pulled, Ray, who had told the coxswain to "port," helped him shove the tiller, which brought the boat nearly broadside to the schooner.

It was a mere venture, but the master's mate had resolved to try it, though it was doubtful, owing to the nearness of the boat to the schooner, that it would be successful.

The sound of the shot was heard before the report of the piece.

There was a crash of splintered wood.

"Any one hurt?" queried Ray.

"No, sir, no," was the response; "only the gunwale smashed."

In fact, the shot had shattered the gunwale ere plowing its way many fathoms down into the depths of the sea.

As the water poured into the boat, the coxswain, obeying Ray's order, brought her head round to the schooner.

"Another stroke, boys, and we are aboard," shouted Ray.

That stroke was given, and as the bow of the sinking boat touched the schooner's side, the brave master's mate, who had leaped forward, sprang at once toward the vessel's main chains.

"Now, men, follow me," he cried.

As he spoke, Watkins aimed a savage blow at him with a long whaling-lance.

This formidable weapon would have pierced the officer's body through and through, had not the smuggler captain at that moment been knocked down by the blow from the butt of a pistol.

That blow was given by Dale, who had noiselessly boarded the schooner on the other side, and, with his men, now had attacked the surprised smugglers.

The next moment, Ray was also aboard the vessel, and his men from the sinking cutter quickly following, the smugglers found themselves hemmed in by their assailants.

"We surrender!" cried Goff, as the cutlasses of the boarding party flashed through the gloom above the heads of the outlaws.

A lantern was lighted, and the stunned Watkins having been restored to his senses, he and his men were bound with cords and transferred to the schooner's hold.

The captain was furious, calling Goff a coward and a traitor, when he learned how speedily he had surrendered.

But his crew, with the gratitude of men whose lives had been saved for the time, declared that he had done perfectly right.

"We were surprised and would have been cut to pieces. Where was the use of resistance?" growled one.

"Fools! don't you know you will have to swing in the end?" cried Watkins. "Wouldn't it have been better to fight to the last?"

To this no answer was made, and Watkins raved on until he was tired.

At dawn a breeze sprang up, when Ray brought the schooner alongside of the light-ship.

He sent a few men aboard of her with Dale to take charge of the craft.

The two vessels were headed northward, Ray intending to make for San Francisco.

On the next day a sail was sighted to windward.

As she drew nearer, all doubts were set at rest.

She proved to be the gun-brig *Dolphin*, and great was the satisfaction of her commander when he learned that the notorious smuggler, Watkins, and his crew had been captured.

In due time the three vessels reached San Francisco, where, eventually, the smugglers had their trial.

Watkins and several of his men were finally executed. The rest were imprisoned for life.

Louisa, the smuggler's adopted daughter, had found her aunt, who was glad to receive her.

She was in comfortable circumstances, and she treated the young girl very kindly.

She sent her to a good school, and in a few years Louisa, who was quick to learn, was as well educated as many young ladies who had had superior advantages.

Dale, who by this time ranked as a second lieutenant, renewed his acquaintance with the beautiful girl, and she finally consented to become his wife.

[THE END.]

ROGER STARBUCK, the author of this story, is also the author of the following stories published in THE 5 CENT WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY: No. 986, "The Lost Boy Captain; or, The Secret of the Hidden Whirlpool." No. 972, "The Mystery of the Fire Ship; or, A Brave Boy Sailing Master." No. 966, "Chums to the Death; or, The Adventures of a Boy Marine." No. 944, "The Limbless Hunter; or, Si Slocum's Revenge." No. 936, "The Waif of Mystery Island; or, The Adventures of a Boy Who Was Kidnapped." No. 923, "Captain Jack, the Pirate's Foe; or, The Devil-Fish of the Indies."

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